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ABSTRACT

Discussed in this report is the City University of New York (CUNY) Transfer Express Project, a 3-year project designed for career-oriented Associate in Applied Science degree (A.A.S.) transfer students at colleges within the university who are not well prepared for baccalaureate study because of an underexposure to writing, math, and liberal arts courses. It is intended to help A.A.S. degree transfer students become better equipped to meet the expectations of the educational experience of this neglected minority, and to facilitate the transition between community and four-year institutions. Persistence, performance, and baccalaureate completion rates of A.A.S. transfers should be increased. At CUNY, A.A.S. students represent the largest transfer cohort yet they are the least well prepared in seeking transfer into four-year schools. Transfer Express activities include reinforcement of basic writing skills, introduction to advanced skills in research, exposure to history, connections with the community and the senior college faculty, and specialized transfer advisement. The project is offered during three consecutive semesters to about 675 CUNY students in two disciplines. It will be replicated nationally for two consecutive semesters at two or three sites. Intended outcomes are to: enhance writing, research, and critical thinking skills; increase student retention at the baccalaureate level; and improve student performance. (SM)

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THE CUNY TRANSFER EXPRESS PROJECT

The City University of New York
Office of Academic Affairs

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

Abstract

The City University of New York (CUNY) has been funded by the Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) to develop and implement the CUNY Transfer Express Project, a three-year project for A.A.S. transfer students at selected colleges within the University.

This project will assist A.A.S. transfer students' adjustment to a four-year college environment. Ultimately, it is intended that persistence, performance, and baccalaureate completion rates of A.A.S. transfers will be increased.

The CUNY Transfer Express model will also focus on articulation issues between two and four-year colleges. Two courses, developed and taught by faculty from two and four-year colleges are at the core of this endeavor. One course is a discipline based technical writing course and the other course is on the history of New York City.

Both formative and summative techniques will be used to evaluate the program.

During the first year, the project will directly benefit students at CUNY, while during the second year it will be expanded to three urban baccalaureate institutions outside of New York.

The results will be presented at a national conference featuring presentations on new directions for increasing the responsiveness of both two and four-year institutions to the A.A.S. transfer population.

For additional information, please contact the project director, University Associate Dean Edwina E. H. Hamby or the project coordinator, Dr. Brenda Wiggins at (212) 794-5459.

Introduction
Background

Nationally, the low transfer rates of community college graduates into four year baccalaureate programs has become the norm rather than the exception. This trend challenges the mission of educational collaboration between two and four year institutions that is intended to provide an educational gateway for students who need alternate routes into baccalaureate degree programs.

Mounting criticism of these low transfer rates has been primarily directed at community colleges. A review of data that spans twenty years reveals that while estimates vary on the rates of graduation from community colleges, the statistics remain at the low end of the continuum. Some researchers estimate as low as 5%, while others estimate up to 24%. In addition, this trend is compounded by low baccalaureate degree completions among community college graduates. For example, according to Cliff Adelman from The Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Community College Research Conference, 17.4% is the recent estimate of these graduation rates (November, 1987).

While the transfer rates remain low, there is an increased belief among students that enrollment in college and gaining employment are contingent upon one another. This undergirds the rising vocationalism among community college students. It is also paralleled in four-year institutions where there is considerable growth in the number of bachelor degrees conferred in areas such as business, engineering and health professions. Alexander Astin's annual survey (Carmody, 1988) reveals that there is an increased perception by undergraduates that a college education and credentials are inextricably linked to employment. In the current, competitive job market, students' attention to post degree employability appears to be a pragmatic and enduring outlook.

In the light of this trend, it is noteworthy that A.A.S. degree students, who graduate with career oriented terminal degrees are also electing to enter four-year institutions in significant numbers. This pattern differs from the tradition of A.A. and A.S. students as the largest community college transfer cohorts who were prepared respectively for baccalaureate programs in liberal arts or sciences.

The emergence of A.A.S. students as the predominant degree transfer cohort extends the community college beyond its original mission and challenges higher education to develop more responsive and flexible programs. If, as data from The City University of New York (CUNY) and Educational Testing Service (ETS) suggest, the A.A.S. degree has become the prevailing credential and the predominant degree with which students seek transfer into four-year schools, how might students' preparedness for further study be improved?

In a national study (1985), V. Lee reports that two-year college students take less English, social studies, science or math during their first two years of college than do four-year students. Lee's data on community college students are aggregated and therefore do not reflect differences among community college students in career programs as compared with those in transfer programs. Nonetheless, she reports that only 20 percent of two-year students took more than one year of English; 17 per cent more than one year of social studies; 17 percent more than one year of science; and 15 percent more than one year of mathematics.

At The City University of New York, A.A.S. students represent the largest transfer cohort (slightly more than one-half of the two-year college graduates who enrolled in CUNY baccalaureate programs in 1986 were A.A.S. graduates). It would stand to reason that in light of their career curricula, and the data presented by V. Lee (1985), A.A.S. students are the least well prepared students seeking transfer into four-year schools. This is true both with regard to the number of transfer credits the four-year schools will accept (and apply toward degree requirements), and with regard to the students' overall preparation for the rigors of a liberal arts degree program.

RECENT TRENDS IN TRANSFER POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

American colleges and universities have demonstrated growing concern about community college transfer students and have focused their collective energies on addressing the problems encountered by the traditional college transfer population, the "academically-oriented" A.A. and A.S. degree recipients. This effort has benefited the targeted students. However, less programmatic attention has been paid to the special problems facing A.A.S. degree recipients, "the career-oriented" students.

The most notable national leadership on the transfer issue has emerged from college-based programs supported by the Ford Foundation's Urban Community College Transfer Opportunities Project and from the American Association of Colleges/Mellon Foundation Transfer Project. Both CUNY and ETS have participated in these initiatives. The University has participated programmatically and ETS has provided evaluation.

Several exemplary transfer programs have focused on different aspects of the process of transferring from community to senior colleges and have furthered the scholarship in this area. Some of these programs are: The South Mountain Community College's University Orientation program (Phoenix, Arizona) which consists of a credit-bearing course designed to support students in the process of transfer; The LaGuardia Community College/CUNY Vassar Exchange Program which not only encourages student transfer but also provides faculty exchange between the two colleges; and the Los Angeles City College Honors Transfer Program (Los Angeles, California) which stresses writings, critical thinking and library research. This wealth of experience on transfer programs has been validated by findings in postsecondary institutions across the nation. Through the study of this experience the elements can be identified for constructing new programs that will foster success for the under-served A.A.S. degree transfer cohort.

One possible programmatic approach to bolster the persistence, performance, and eventually the graduation rates is to develop a "bridge" or transition program that is specifically designed to ease the move for students graduating from two- and seeking entry into four-year institutions. Such a program must respond to the observation that many two-year students are not sufficiently prepared for the academic environment they will encounter at the baccalaureate institution (Collison, 1987). In addition, the program should note that when a university or four-year college finds that it has a greater number of its upper division student body drawn from transfer cohorts, that baccalaureate program must change (Smith, 1984).

This does not mean that two-year colleges should cease efforts to raise standards of instruction, nor does it mean that four-year colleges should teach to the least common denominator represented by some community

college students. Rather, two- and four-year colleges should actively collaborate to raise academic standards, foster improved student performance, develop flexible curricula and communicate their expectations to all students.

Summary findings of the Ford Foundation's Transfer Opportunities Program (Donovan, Schaier-Peleg, Forer, 1987) yield numerous successful strategies that might lend themselves to a bridge program:

1. Key administrators and faculty from two- and four-year colleges should periodically discuss curriculum, teaching strategies and outcomes.

2. Two- and four-year colleges should exchange faculty and staff, particularly in transfer-related courses.

3. Community colleges should assist four-year colleges in identifying and recruiting transfer students, particularly minority students.

4. Students should be exposed to reading from primary sources and text-based writing in all academic disciplines.

5. Post-transfer student performance data should be made available to community colleges.

With these findings in mind, The City University of New York is collaboratively developing a program that will address the problems of A.A.S. transfers and enhance their performance, and completion of the baccalaureate degree.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAM

The City University of New York Transfer Express Project is a three-year pilot project designed to provide instruction for A.A.S. transfers starting in the first-year at selected sites within the University. The project will be replicated at two -three national demonstration sites during the second year. This three-part demonstration program is intended to benefit

directly CUNY A.A.S. degree transfers; to benefit directly A.A.S. transfers at three urban baccalaureate institutions outside of New York City; and to result in a national dissemination conference which will feature reports of the multi-site Transfer Express Project presentations on new directions for increasing the responsiveness of both two- and four-year institutions to the A.A.S. transfer population.

As previously mentioned, A.A.S. students are not well prepared for baccalaureate study. They are underexposed to the liberal arts and they are accustomed to a vocational emphasis in the classroom. It is estimated that one-third of the A.A.S. curriculum at colleges of The City University of New York is devoted to such courses. In light of the career orientation of the A.A.S. curriculum, these students frequently need additional exposure to writing, math and liberal arts courses in order to develop critical thinking abilities and persist in baccalaureate programs.

Based on their community college experience, A.A.S. degree transfers frequently do not understand the degree requirements and intellectual culture of baccalaureate programs. Primarily, the students are focused on their major and are often impatient with core or distribution requirements which they perceive as impediments to graduation and career advancement. In addition, they perceive the familiar policies and practices of their community college as a universal absolute and while clinging to the familiar approach of the two-year institution, they feel at odds with the different practices and expectations of the baccalaureate college. The proposed Transfer Express is designed to address these problems: to improve students' writing, reasoning and critical thinking abilities, and to familiarize them with the norms and mores of four-year institutions.

In constructing the Transfer Express as a programmatic response to problems of students' academic needs and students' expectations, the question of the implementation of this program was a major consideration. An examination of summer intervention programs at CUNY and programs such as CUNY SEEK and College Discovery coupled with a review of the literature resulted in the plan to design a course to develop students' writing, research and analytical skills and to develop another course that would provide exposure to subject matter in liberal arts through the study of history.

Essential to the writing component of the Transfer Express Project is the reinforcement of basic writing skills along with the introduction of more advanced skills in research. A discipline based focus was included in the design of the writing course to enable students to see clearly the connection between excellent written communication skills, progress in their major fields, and ultimately success in their careers.

Writing courses using the disciplines of computer science and allied health will be developed to accommodate the sizable numbers of A.A.S. students in computer science and allied health who transfer to four-year institutions. The selected colleges, Queens and Hunter, respectively will remain as CUNY demonstration sites throughout this three-year project.

Each of the discipline based writing courses will be exported to one of the two - three national sites in the second year. Each national site will negotiate with the project staff to determine which of the disciplines will undergird their writing course.

The decision to develop a history course was made because in contrast to most A.A.S. degree programs, virtually all baccalaureate programs include some history requirements. In addition to addressing a void in the preparation of most A.A.S. studies, the discipline of history will offer excitement through the investigation of primary sources; ensure greater exposure to the demands of upper division research and analysis; challenge students' judgements; reinforce their writing skills and help them create alternative visions of the world. It was decided that the course should expose students to concerns of immigration, social problems, economic systems, descriptive statistics and future implications. It was also decided that the course would be entitled "New York--Yesterday-Tomorrow: History, People and Economy." Each of the demonstration sites will develop a regionally based history component that parallels the CUNY course.

Essential to the construction of the proposed CUNY Transfer Express are the connections built between the community and the senior college faculty of the participating institutions. During the first year of the project each history course will be designed and team taught by two

faculty (one from a CUNY community college and one from the senior college at which the Express is being implemented). Similarly, the discipline based writing courses will be developed by three faculty: one writing specialist from a community college, one writing specialist from the participating senior college, and a subject specialist (e.g., allied health, computer science). At all of the national demonstration sites, the writing courses will be team taught by writing instructors from the senior and the community colleges.

Finally the Transfer Express will provide specialized transfer advisement that includes early evaluation of the students' advanced standing, early advisement and, whenever possible, early registration.

The development and implementation of the project is being closely monitored by the project staff who are being assisted in this effort by several key people. First, an Advisory Board of three or four persons well acquainted with issues of transfer will be actively involved in the Express. The Board will meet at least twice annually during the three-year initiative to establish guidelines, review activities and make recommendations. Second, each participating senior college will have a coordinator, a mid-level administrator who will assist in the implementation of the CUNY Transfer Express Project. Third, The CUNY Transfer Express Project will be subject to formative evaluation in the first two years of its existence and summative evaluation in the third year. Dr. Michael Nettles will serve as the external evaluator of the project.

Dissemination of project results will be accomplished in three ways: 1) through presentations at national FIPSE conferences by project staff in Years 02 and 03; 2) through presentations at the annual CUNY Articulation Conference in Year 03; and 3) through the publication of a monograph and the sponsorship of a national conference for faculty and administrators interested in addressing the needs of the A.A.S. transfer student population in Year 03.

In summary, over the term of the proposed project the Transfer Express will be offered during three consecutive semesters to approximately 675 CUNY students in two disciplines at two participating CUNY scolleges. It will be replicated nationally for two consecutive semesters at two - three

sites to a target audience of 450 additional students. The program will be carefully administered, rigorously assessed and widely reported. It is anticipated that both The City University and each demonstration site will institutionalize the Express and draw upon it for continued program development long after the three-year pilot has concluded.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

The Transfer Express is intended to substantiate the perception that the A.A.S. degree transfer student needs experiences at the four-year college to enhance his or her education; to enhance the educational experience of this neglected minority; and to improve transitions between community and four-year colleges for students who enter the four-year college with an A.A.S. degree. The following outcomes are anticipated from the Transfer Express:

- Through exposure to the disciplines of technical writing and history in the Bridge pilot programs, the writing, critical thinking, analytical, and research skills of A.A.S. degree transfers will be reinforced and improved, and their readiness for four-year level work will be enhanced substantially;

- Through the registration/advisement component of the program, A.A.S. degree transfer students will navigate through the transfer experience more steadily and make better adjustment to the four-year college and its degree requirements.

- Through the concept of the Bridge program and early exposure to courses which satisfy baccalaureate degree requirements, A.A.S. transfers in the pilot programs should progress more rapidly toward their bachelors' degrees.

- The dropout rate for A.A.S. students who enter four-year colleges through the CUNY Transfer Express Program should be lower than that of A.A.S. transfer students who were not enrolled in CUNY Transfer Express transition Program.

- The academic performance of students in the CUNY Transfer Express who persist and/or complete the baccalaureate should be improved.

- By concentrating special attention and counseling for A.A.S. transfers early in the transfer experience, long-term costs of program counseling and other individualized support services should be reduced.

Finally, the CUNY Transfer Express is intended to increase the awareness in both community and four-year colleges of the growing numbers of A.A.S. students who transfer to baccalaureate programs, and to provide other institutions with a proven model for helping such students.

For additional information, please contact the project director, University Associate Dean Edwina E. H. Hamby or the project coordinator, Dr. Brenda Wiggins at (212) 794-5459.